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Letter dated 12 March 2004 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the statement by the President of the Security Council dated 20 November 2003 (S/PRST/2003/23), in which the Security Council called on the countries of the Great Lakes region and the international community to support the efforts of my Special Representative, Mr. Ibrahima Fall, and requested me to keep it informed of developments in the region.

As I indicated in my report of 17 November 2003 (S/2003/1099), major progress has been made over the past six months towards the convening of an international conference on the Great Lakes region. When the preparatory process was launched in Nairobi last June, the future orientation of the conference and its main elements were determined. With the help of the United Nations, the African Union and donor countries, the countries of the region have established a framework for their discussions of substantive issues. They have established national preparatory committees and agreed to hold several preparatory and thematic meetings prior to the two summit meetings.

For the past three months, my Special Representative has helped the countries of the region to put into place the necessary framework for the conference to be held as soon as possible. In December 2003 and January 2004, two preparatory meetings were held under the auspices of the United Nations and the African Union, and others should take place in the coming months.

Given the progress made in the preparatory process, the Office of my Special Representative will face an increasing workload over the coming months. In particular, it must assist the countries of the region in organizing and providing follow-up to preparatory meetings and in the establishment and smooth operation of the national preparatory committees. Currently, however, the Office has only seven administrators, including my Special Representative. In order for it to perform its tasks efficiently, nine additional international civil servants will be needed. I hope that I can count on the support of the international community to provide the Office of my Special Representative with the resources necessary for the success of its mission.

I should be grateful if you would bring this letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**

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